

POLS 3313: Public Opinion, Media and Technology

Syllabus Spring 2022

Basic Course Info

Class Meeting Place: UGLC 342

Class Meeting Time: MW 1:30-2:50

Professor Information

Dr. Marcos Menchaca

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Office: Benedict Hall 308

Office Hours: Tuesday 3:15-5:00pm, Thursday 3:15-4:15pm and by appointment

Course Description

This course gives you an understanding of how political scientists study American public opinion. For democratic countries, the people are supposed to decide what course their country should take. Hence, people's opinions have real public policy outcomes that shape our world. You will learn how people form opinions about political issues, how they develop a general ideology, and how they develop an identification with a political party—among many other topics. There is a canon of knowledge in political science about how people develop political opinions. I will use this canonical approach in this class. The main goal of the class is for you to be able to navigate the vast political behavior literature. This is why I put so many extra readings in the syllabus (in case you wish to do further study). After studying this canon, we will move on to variegated topics on identity politics, political psychology, political communication and the news media, voting behavior, and rationality in political thinking.

Textbooks/Required Readings

Robert Erikson and Kent Tedin. (2019). *American Public Opinion*. 10th Edition (ET)

Jane Hall. (2021). *Politics and the Media*. CQ Press (Hall)

Course Outcomes

After successful completion of this course, the student should be able to

- Demonstrate knowledge and awareness of contemporary issues and their historical contexts;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the seminal works in the political behavior literature;
- Demonstrate sophisticated skills in reading these primary sources critically;

- Comprehend the process by which political scientists collect and analyze public opinion data;
- Understand the way in which political scientists go about forming hypotheses, testing them, and subsequently engage in debate when there is no consensus;
- Be able to apply the thought process of the political behavior literature to new situations.

UTEP EDGE

Students will be able to:

- Communicate information clearly and effectively using a variety of tools, media and genres (oral, written, iconographic) in varied contexts for a variety of purposes.
- Demonstrate strategic and adaptable thinking patterns in learning and working conditions.
- Apply analysis, synthesis, and evaluative processes that enable productive problem solving and decision-making to strengthen performance in university and workforce setting.
- Reflect and assess their interests, abilities, responsibilities, cultural understanding, and ethics in order to more effectively pursue their academic, career and life goals.
- Use real world digital tools, research, and resources to access, evaluate, and apply information appropriate for authentic tasks.

Evaluation

There will be four pop quiz exams. The midterm and the final are given in the schedule below. Your grade will depend on the following four items. Letter grades will be determined by a curve (percentiles of the class) of all of your scores added up.

Quizzes (6 each worth 5% each)	30%
Midterm 1	20%
Midterm 2	20%
Final	25%
Reflection Paper	5%

Naturally, the Midterm 1 will cover all the material covered in lecture up to that point. Midterm 2 will only cover material after Midterm 1. The final is not comprehensive but will cover only topics after the Midterm 2. The reflection paper will be about one of the topics we will over in this class, which I will decide at a later date and announce it through an email with an accompanying prompt.

General Course Policies

I expect you to take reasonable actions if anything comes up during the semester. For example, if you must be absent from the midterm due to an emergency (such as being

hospitalized), you need to email me as soon as possible when you are capable of doing so. Be sure to take obtain all the necessary paperwork.

I do not plan on making any major changes to this syllabus (the lecture schedule may change slightly based on how fast/long I take to finish each lecture). But if I do change the syllabus, I will let you know through email.

Email will be my main method of communication with you. If you are not receiving my emails, please notify me immediately because each email will contain important announcements.

There is to be no talking in class. When I am giving lectures, you are allowed to use a laptop but only to take class notes.

You will need to save your papers to some cloud sharing service. I do not accept the “my computer crashed with all my work on it” excuse anymore.

Course Assignments/Requirements/Course Schedule

Please note that this schedule is approximate. The only things are set in stone are the exam and assignment dates. Readings in the color blue are recommended but not required.

Week 1

Jan 18 – Class Introduction

- Syllabus
- ET Preface

Jan 20 – Introduction to the Study of Public Opinion

- ET chapter 1
- Methods Primer

Week 2

Jan 25 – Public Opinion and Democratic Theory

- ET chapter 1

Jan 27 – Survey Methodology

- ET chapter 2
- [Cavari and Freedman \(2018\). *Polarized Mass or Polarized Few?*](#)
- [Aldrich and McGraw \(2011\). *Improving Public Opinion Surveys*, chapters 1-3](#)

Week 3

Feb 1 – Partisanship

- ET chapter 3.3
- [Leeper and Slothuus \(2012\). *Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Public Opinion Formation*](#)

- Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook (2014). *The Influence of Partisan Motivated Reasoning on Public Opinion*
- Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002). *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, chapter 1

Feb 3 – Ideology

- Converse (1964), *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*, pp. 1-10
- Kinder and Kalmoe (2017). *Nether Liberal nor Conservative*. Chapters intro, 1-2

Week 4

Feb 8 – Response Theory

- Converse (1964). *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*, pp. 10-40
- Achen (1975). *Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response*
- Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008). *The Strength of Issues*

Feb 10 – Political Knowledge

- ET chapter 3.1 (pages 56-60)
- Lupia (2015). *Uninformed*, chapters 1-2
- Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996). *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*
- Neuman and Neuman (1986). *The Paradox of Mass Politics*

Week 5

Feb 15 – Receive-Accept-Sample Theory Part I

- ET chapter 3.1 (pages 60-67)
- Zaller (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Public Opinion*, chapters 1-2

Feb 17 – Receive-Accept-Sample Theory Part II

- Zaller (1998). *Monica Lewinsky's Contribution to Political Science*
- Bartels. *The Political Education of John Zaller*

Week 6

Feb 22 – **Midterm 1**

Feb 24 – Macrolevel Opinion

- ET chapter 4
- Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002). *The Macro Polity*, chapters 1-2 and 6

Week 7

Mar 1 – Political Polarization

- Abramowitz and Sanders (2008). *Is Polarization a Myth?*
- Abramowitz (2012). *Disappearing Center*, pp. 37-40
- Fiorina and Abrams (2010). *Where's the Polarization?*
- Menchaca (2022). *Are Americans Polarized on Issues Dimensions?*
- Feldman and Johnston (2013). *Understanding the Determinants of Political Ideology: Implications of Structural Complexity*

Mar 3 – Political Socialization

- ET chapter 5

Week 8

Mar 8 – Social Identity Theory

- [Tajfel and Turner \(1979\). *An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict*](#)

Mar 10 – Partisanship as Identity Politics

- [Mason \(2016\). *A Cross-Cutting Calm*](#)
- [Mason \(2018\). *Uncivil Disagreement*, chapters 1-2](#)

Week 9

Mar 15 – Spring Break

Mar 17 – Spring Break

Week 10

Mar 22 – Affective Polarization

- [Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes \(2012\). *Affect, Not Ideology*](#)
- [Mason and Wronsky \(2018\). *One Tribe to Bind Them All*](#)

Mar 24 – Racial Politics: Opinions on African Americans

- ET chapter 7.2
- [Tesler and Sears \(2010\). *Obama's Race*, chapter 1](#)
- [Tesler \(2016\). *Views About Race Mattered More in Electing Trump Than in Electing Obama*](#)
- [Tesler \(2012\). *The Return of Old-Fashioned Racism to White Americans' Partisan Preferences in the Early Obama Era*](#)

Week 11

Mar 29 – Racial Politics: White Identity

- [Jardina \(2019\). *White Identity Politics*, chapter 1 \(chapters 2-3 recommended\)](#)
- [Mutz \(2018\). *Status Threat, Not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote*](#).
- [Mutz \(2021\). *The Racialization of International Trade*](#)

Mar 31 – Personality Traits and Core Values

- [Gerber, Huber, Doherty, and Dowling \(2001\). *The Big Five Personality Traits in the Political Arena*](#)
- [Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos \(2016\). *Group Empathy Theory*](#)
- [Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, and Ha \(2010\). *Personality and Political Attitudes*](#)
- [Feldman \(1988\). *Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion*](#)
- [Goren \(2005\). *Party Identification and Core Political Values*](#)

Week 12

Apr 5 – **Midterm 2**

Apr 7 – Political Attitudes and Voting Behavior

- ET chapter 9
- Bartels (1986). *Issue Voting Under Uncertainty*

Week 13

Apr 12 – Public Opinion and Its Effect on Public Policy

- ET chapter 10
- Page and Shapiro (1983). *The Effects of Public Opinion on Policy*

Apr 14 – Introduction to Media Studies

- ET chapter 8
- Iyengar and Kinder (1989). *News That Matters*, chapters 2-3

Week 14

Apr 19 – Media Effects on Public Opinion

- Hall chapters 1-3
- Levendusky and Malhotra (2017). *Does Media Coverage of Partisan Polarization Affect Political Attitudes?*

Apr 21 – The Changing Nature of the Media and Public Opinion

- Prior (2005). *News vs. Entertainment*
- Darr and Dunaway (2017). *Resurgent Mass Partisanship Revisited*

Week 15

Apr 26 – Media Bias and Uncivility in Public Discourse

- Hall chapters 4-6
- Mutz (2015). *In Your Face Politics: The Consequences of Uncivil Media*. Chapters 1-3
- Nyhan, Porter, Reifler, and Wood (2019). *Taking Fact-Check Literally But Not Seriously*

Apr 28 – Democratic Stability

- ET chapter 6
- McClosky (1964). *Consensus and Ideology in American Politics*
- Prothro and Grigg (1960). *Fundamental Principles of Democracy*

Week 16

May 3 – Economic Class and Political Attitudes

- Bartels (2006). *What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas?*
- Feldman and Zaller (1992). *The Political Culture of Ambivalence*
- Gimpelson and Treisman (2016). *Misperceiving Inequality*

May 5 – Rationality in Politics (**REFLECTION PAPERS DUE**)

- Simon (1995). *Rationality in Political Behavior*
- Lupia, McCubbins, Popkin (2000). *Elements of Reason*, chapters 1 and 13

May 12 – **FINAL EXAM 1:00-2:30pm**